

Oyster Roast Lovers: Choose Your Shucking 'Weapons'

If you really want to get to know a person, don't bother engaging him in conversation—just take him to an oyster roast and check out the kind of oyster knife he uses and how well he handles it.

I learned long ago—well, last year anyway—that oyster shucking is serious business and that oyster knives, in particular, can be as revealing about an individual as the car he drives or the house he lives in.

This realization hit me square in the face when I witnessed what can happen when a Sunday shucker—someone who eats roasted oysters only once or twice a year—jumps in

over his head and tries to open his oysters with a knife that is unsuited to his temperament and/or experience.

On that enlightening occasion, my wife and I entered a Calabash restaurant and were greeted by the sight of a man who had skewered his palm with his oyster knife. A waitress was running for the first-aid kit as the victim held a blood-soaked cloth napkin to his hand.

He was an elderly gent who didn't appear to be in the best of health to start with, and it's entirely possible that the self-inflicted wound wasn't an accident. For all I know, he might have been trying to end it all right

Rahn Adams



then and there with his oyster knife.

But I suspect that despite his age, he was merely an inexperienced shucker who threw caution to the wind and picked a knife that he just couldn't handle. Either that or he stabbed himself while cleaning his

knife. I've been told that happens a lot with guns, too.

Before I scare anyone, let me point out that the knives you can rent at the N.C. Oyster Festival are safe. They're kind of like the round-tipped scissors you had to use in kindergarten. As long as you don't get too frustrated opening your oysters and don't go berserk, you should be OK.

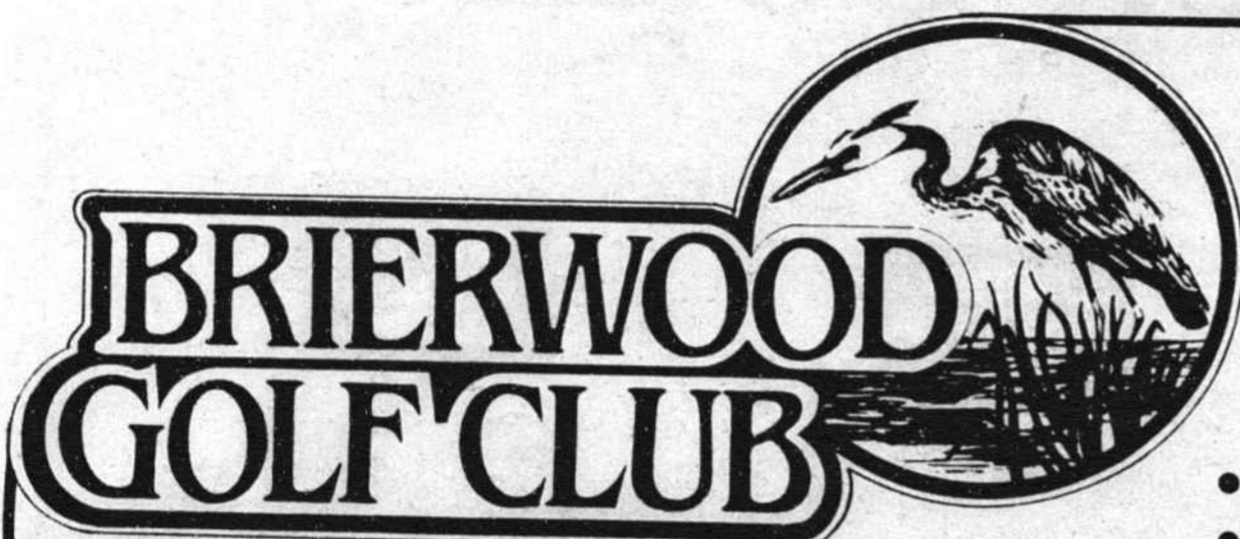
But after that encounter with the darker side of oyster shucking, I decided I'd better find a knife that I could practice with in the privacy of my own home, so that I could wield it with confidence when the chips—or rather, the oyster shells—

were down in public.

At last year's festival, I noticed that famed oyster-shucking champion Cathy Carlisle of Boones Neck used one of those professional-type knives—the equivalent of an automatic assault rifle. The blade is short but tapered and honed to a fighting edge. I imagine the wooden handle of her knife is full of notches. Have oyster knife; will travel.

That style of oyster sticker isn't for me, though, since I'm not cool enough under pressure to handle a potentially lethal weapon. If I have a particularly exasperating time getting the charcoal started when

(See OYSTER, Page 22)



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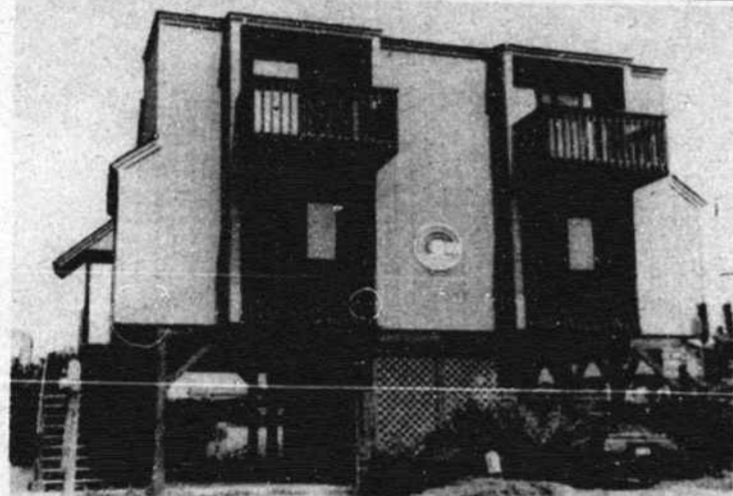
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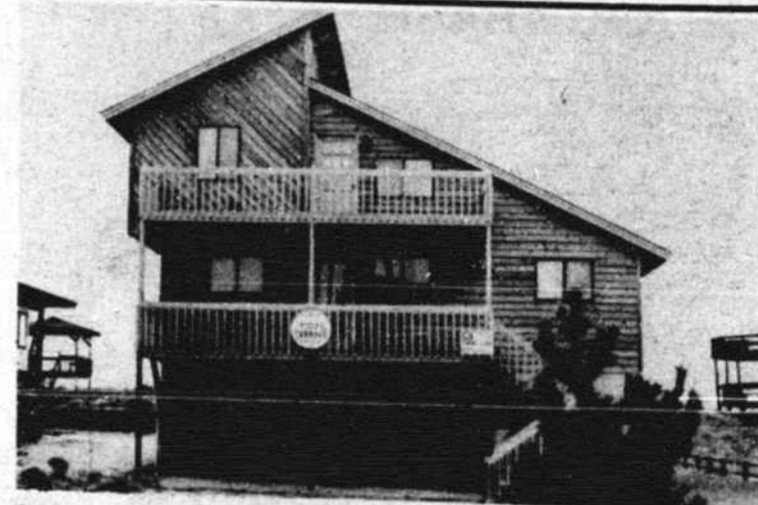
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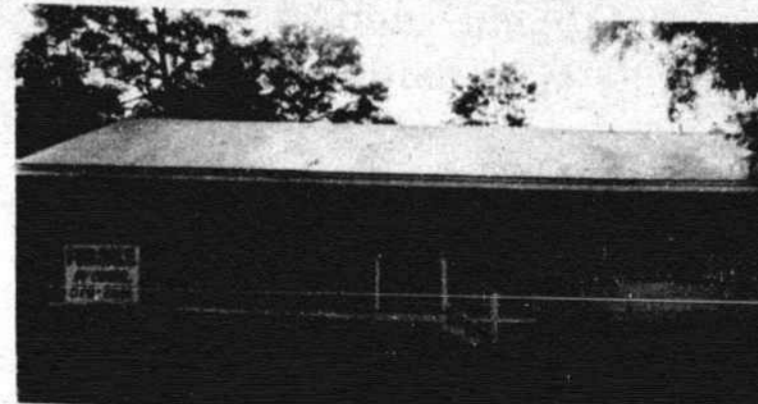
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